

American Indians/Alaska Natives

Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders

Blacks



Focus On

Tomorrow

*What Matters Most
in 2008 and Beyond*

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual
and Transgendered Persons

Hispanics

Women and Girls

Focus On Tomorrow

VOTERS AND THE ISSUES

Whether you're a first-time voter, like NEA student member Sheena Royster, or a polling booth veteran, like long-time teacher Geoffrey Au, 2008 is a year for the history books. For Royster and Au, both ethnic minorities, the 2008 election embodies democracy in action and the power of all Americans to shape the nation's future.

Eighty years after the Nineteenth Amendment guaranteed women the right to vote, 40 years after the Voting Rights Act outlawed practices that disenfranchised minority voters, and 12 years after the Supreme Court gave the GLBT community constitutional protection against discrimination, the nation stands at a crossroads, witness to events many thought they would never see in their lifetime.

The landmark candidacies of Democratic Senators Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton for 44th president of the United States marked a defining moment in the nation's history and a tremendous validation for women, minorities, and other underserved communities. The historic choice of Governor Sarah Palin as a Republican vice presidential running mate quickly followed, marking the first time a woman had been named to that party's top ticket and ensuring that, no matter which party won the White House, either an African American or a woman would reach the heights of American political destiny.

Yet, many voters face a sobering reality: Even as they celebrate the remarkable achievements of high-profile individuals, they—due to their race, gender, or sexual orientation—still struggle for equal citizenship. What are the unique concerns of these voters? Which hot-button issues will affect their political choices in 2008, 2010, and 2012?

Focus on Tomorrow uses statistical data from a wide range of sources to answer these and other questions about the political priorities, voting patterns, and human and civil rights concerns of six groups whose voices must be heard and votes counted: American Indians and Alaska Natives; Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders; Blacks, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered Persons; Hispanics; and Women and Girls. As these voters flex their political muscles, today's politicians are taking note of their growing ability to sway the outcome of tomorrow's elections in the local, state, and national arenas.



What Matters Most to American Indians and Alaska Natives

American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/ANs) maintain a unique status as sovereign nations due to treaties signed with the United States government in exchange for vast tracts of aboriginal land. The diversity among the 562 federally recognized tribes, located primarily in the West, is great.

Increasingly, AI/AN communities are becoming more engaged in local, state, and national elections, as voters and candidates. In 2007, 64 AI/ANs served in state legislatures in 14 states, a record. A survey of eight states' AI/AN voters showed increases from 50 percent to 150 percent in voter participation from 2000 to 2004.

From 2000 to 2006, the Native vote influenced U.S. senatorial elections in states such as Washington, South Dakota, and Montana and gubernatorial elections in Arizona and New Mexico. AI/AN voters are swayed most by a candidate's record of support for Native issues.

American Indians and Alaska Natives were not granted U.S. citizenship until 1925; states retained authority to grant the right to vote. Through the 1960s, Indian voting rights were still the subject of court cases in Utah and New Mexico. Prior federal legislation granted citizenship only if Indians gave up tribal affiliation. Early federal efforts to register AI/ANs led to the taking of lands, forcible enrollment of children in boarding schools, and relocation. Such historical events created a sense of disenfranchisement and distrust, which must be overcome to engage Native voters.

Data on AI/AN voting patterns are not collected by the Census Bureau, due in part to reservation populations being generally small and AI/ANs in urban areas being scattered, thereby missing critical voting trends. Current and future technology advances will, hopefully, lead to data collection in 2008, and beyond, to inform all interested parties, including the American Indian and Alaska Native community.

FAST FACTS

- American Indians and Alaska Natives number at least **4.6 million**, **1.6%** of the total population, **60%** of whom reside in urban areas.
- States with 100,000+ AI/AN populations: **California, Oklahoma, Arizona, New Mexico, Washington, Michigan, Florida, Texas, New York, North Carolina, and Arkansas.**
- About **3 million** AI/ANs (**66%**) are eligible to vote.
- In the 2004 presidential election, estimates indicate **90%** of AI/ANs who cast ballots voted Democratic.

HOT ISSUES FOR AI/ANs

- 1 SOVEREIGNTY AND GOVERNMENT-TO-GOVERNMENT RELATIONS
- 2 CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE EDUCATION
- 3 ECONOMY
- 4 CLIMATE CHANGE

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ISSUES AT A GLANCE

National tribal leaders prepared a 2008 platform for all political parties that included these key concerns:

1 Sovereignty and Government-to-Government Relations. Indian tribes and Alaska Native governments are sovereigns recognized in the U.S. Constitution and acknowledged in numerous executive actions, federal legislation, and U.S. Supreme Court decisions. This unique government-to-government relationship creates a legal and moral responsibility on the part of the United States. Tribal communities remain vigilant for groups and campaigns promoting the legal termination of tribal status. AI/AN voters seek candidates who support and respect tribal sovereignty.

2 Culturally Appropriate Education. AI/AN students attending K–12 public schools number almost 550,000. Another 50,000 attend the Bureau of Indian Education’s federally funded schools, a system composed of 184 schools on or near Indian reservations in 23 states. The federal role in Indian education began under an assimilationist policy. Now that AI/AN students are scattered across public schools nationwide, scant attention is paid to their culturally specific learning styles, curriculum needs, and language differences. This cultural dissonance, in part,

accounts for Native youths’ high 50 percent dropout rate. The AI/AN community believes the president’s Executive Order on Indian Education, re-issued in 2004, must be reinforced and implemented fully. Federal and state support of the Native American Languages Act, re-authorized in 2006, is essential to preserve and protect the 200+ traditional Native languages, which are spoken only in North America and embody unique AI/AN world views and values.

3 Economy. Economic development is key to reducing high rates of AI/AN unemployment and poverty, especially on Indian reservations. Federal support and expanded use of the Buy Indian Act and other contracting programs could stimulate economic growth in tribal communities.

4 Climate Change. AIs/ANs believe traditional indigenous knowledge has as much value as western scientific knowledge and contains valuable lessons for people all around the world. Tribal communities have seen disproportionately high adverse effects on reservation lands due to erosion and drought. Climate change also may threaten tribal traditions rooted in local ecosystems. Traditional indigenous knowledge and the tribal, spiritual relationship to the earth must be acknowledged, and tribes must be involved in climate change initiatives and legislation.

FOCUS ON HUMAN AND CIVIL RIGHTS

American Indians and Alaska Natives continue to face racial discrimination in many aspects of their lives, such as employment hiring and firing practices; access to safe and affordable housing; and access to medical attention for epidemic levels of diabetes, heart disease, cancer, suicide, and alcoholism. For these and other reasons, the AI/AN population strongly supports social reforms of all types.

AIs/ANs’ ability to vote on such reforms can be hindered by numerous factors: lack of knowledge about the electoral process and their voting rights; state requirements that deny the use of tribal IDs as acceptable identification; state requirements of a numbered street address in isolated, rural communities where only P.O. Box addresses exist; distant polling places; discriminatory redistricting ordinances; and nonenforcement of section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, which requires that non-English speakers receive a standard and accurate translation of voting materials.

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Tomorrow

What Matters Most to Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (APIs) comprise an extremely diverse and growing voting population that is politically knowledgeable and engaged.

In key states such as Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Virginia, APIs form a large enough voting bloc (more than 50,000 voting age API citizens per state) to influence the outcome of statewide elections.

In addition, more than 10,000 voting age API citizens per state reside in Iowa, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Mexico, and Wisconsin—where (except for Missouri) 6,000 to 11,000 votes decided the 2004 U.S. presidential election.

In 2000 and 2004, more Asian Americans voted Democrat than Republican, representing a switch from the 1990s

when the majority of Asians supported Republican candidates. In the 2006 U.S. House of Representative elections, APIs voted 62 percent Democrat and 37 percent Republican.

One key to identifying and addressing API concerns is appreciating the diversity within the API community. Different API communities have different income and education levels; different immigration circumstances and histories; and different cultural, ethnic, and political beliefs. While there are issues common to many APIs, all API voters do not share the same concerns. So it's a good idea to investigate individual community concerns prior to engaging API voters. And since 50 languages are spoken within the API community, in some cases it may be important to engage APIs in their spoken language as well as in English.

FAST FACTS

- ➔ Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders number **15 million** residents or **5.3 %** of the total U.S. population.
- ➔ Ten largest Asian-American groups: **Chinese, Filipino, Asian Indian, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese, Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, and Pakistani.**
- ➔ Five largest Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander groups: **Native Hawaiian, Samoan, Guamanian/Chamorro, Tongan, and Fijian.**
- ➔ About **7 million** Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are eligible to vote; close to **3.5 million** have registered to vote.

HOT ISSUES FOR APIs

- ① ACCURATE DATA
- ② EQUAL ACCESS
- ③ IMMIGRATION REFORM
- ④ ECONOMY/EDUCATION/HEALTH CARE

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ISSUES AT A GLANCE

1 Accurate Data. Because the design, operation, and evaluation of programs and policies of government, schools, services, and organizations are data driven, more specific data that capture differences among subpopulations within the API umbrella must be collected at the national level. The lack of accurate data about specific communities harms APIs in the areas of civil rights/hate crimes monitoring, economic justice, education, health care, and immigration because the needs and challenges within particular ethnic communities don't surface when data are collected and analyzed only at the broadest level.

2 Equal Access. Thirty-four percent of Asian Americans and eight percent of Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders live in households in which English is not the primary spoken language. Language barriers make it difficult for APIs to secure or access civil rights protections; housing; equal educational opportunity and accurate school testing; health services; and help in navigating the immigration system. APIs seek more translation and interpretation services to help them access all essential services and systems.

3 Immigration Reform. APIs seek immigration reforms that keep families together. These include: reducing backlogs of immigrant visa petitions; allowing pathways for immigrants to pursue higher education and U.S. citizenship; increasing access to essential services regardless of immigration status; protecting against the intimidation, exploitation, and trafficking of immigrants; and allowing for due process and fairness in immigration proceedings and detention.

4 Economy/Education/Health Care. APIs are focused on a number of economic issues, including the availability of affordable housing and the reduction of discriminatory mortgage lending practices. Educational goals include fair testing and improved teaching of API English Language Learner students, engagement of API parents and adult learners, and recruitment of more API educators. Health care issues include improving health care access and coverage for APIs and increasing research and funding on health concerns that disproportionately affect the API population, such as hepatitis B, liver disease, and lung and liver cancer.

FOCUS ON HUMAN AND CIVIL RIGHTS

Because issues such as affirmative action, discrimination, hate crimes, immigration, and voting rights affect the API community, human and civil rights issues are very important to this population.

APIs experience discrimination in employment (e.g., "glass ceiling" in promotions, English-only rules, accent bias) as well as religion-based or national-origin-based discrimination. Many APIs also face linguistic and cultural barriers in registering to vote or voting at the polls. Other specific concerns include federal recognition of Native Hawaiians and equal treatment and veteran status for Filipinos who served during WWII.

APIs believe many of the civil rights violations they experience are related to ethnic stereotypes perpetuated in the media, literature, and even in the law. For example, many APIs are sensitive to the perception they are "perpetual foreigners," regardless of their citizenship.

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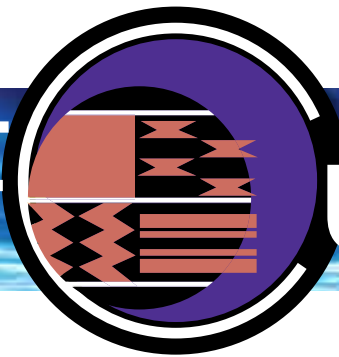
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What Matters Most to Blacks

The long battle Black Americans waged for their inalienable rights as American citizens transformed the social and political landscape of the nation and continues to shape America today. Blacks are proud of the gains they've made since the modern civil rights movement but feel a renewed sense of political purpose as they see many of these gains eroding.

Black Americans have been the Democratic party's most loyal voting bloc—a trend that started in the 1930s, when Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal provided economic relief during the Great Depression, and solidified in the 1960s, when Presidents Kennedy and Johnson championed civil rights legislation.

Recently, however, the feeling among Black voters that their vote was being taken for granted led to a slight decline in support for the Democratic Party. At least 25 percent of younger Black voters now identify as Independent,

and Independent voter registration has grown in Black communities on both coasts.

In the 2004 presidential election, Black Republicans made up 11 percent of Black voters, up from nine percent in the 2000 election. But there also is growing frustration among Black Republicans who say their party has not made a concerted effort to bring Black voters into the fold. Some young Black voters who call themselves "hip-hop Republicans" are focused on building the party up from a local level by bringing in urban Black voters.

Whatever their political affiliation, Democratic Senator Barack Obama's nomination as the first Black presidential candidate of a major political party marked a defining moment in the lives of all Black Americans. Obama's campaign has energized the Black electorate, many of whom feel that, for the first time, they are truly participating in the American Dream.

FAST FACTS

- ➔ Black Americans make up **13.4%** of the population and **11.6%** of registered voters.
- ➔ The largest proportion (**55%**) of the Black vote is in the South.
- ➔ In 2004, Black voter turnout was higher than White voter turnout in **California, Georgia, Illinois, Mississippi, Missouri, and North Carolina.**
- ➔ Nearly **13 million** Black Americans voted in the 2000 presidential election—**84.2%** of registered Black voters.

HOT ISSUES FOR BLACKS

- ① ECONOMY
- ② ENERGY
- ③ HEALTH CARE
- ④ IRAQ WAR
- ⑤ EDUCATION AND CRIME

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ISSUES AT A GLANCE

1 Economy. In 2000, Black Americans listed education as the most important problem facing the country, but today, with an unemployment rate double that of White citizens and a poverty rate nearly three times that of White families, Blacks rate the economy as the country's foremost concern. Blacks have been the hardest hit by the collapse of the housing market and are losing their homes on a massive scale. National civil rights groups are calling for the housing industry to work actively with homeowners to transition them to affordable loans.

2 Energy. After the economy, soaring gas and energy prices dominate the concerns of Black Americans, for whom transportation is the second highest household expenditure. The median income of Black families is 58 percent that of Whites, but Blacks expend 25 percent more of their income on energy, including electricity and natural gas, than the national average. More Black families will become "fuel poor" as the demand for energy rises.

3 Health Care. Winning health care reform is a top concern of Blacks, who suffer from more diseases, disabilities, and early deaths than Whites—including an HIV/AIDS epidemic that's the leading cause of death for Blacks between the ages of 25 and 44. According to research studies, Blacks

experience more problems accessing care, often receive lower quality care than other Americans, and are more likely to be uninsured. Even when Black patients have similar insurance, incomes, and health problems as Whites, they receive a lower quality and intensity of care.

4 Iraq War. Though worries about the economy have shifted the nation's attention from the war in Iraq, it's still on the top five list of concerns for Black Americans, who make up 13 percent of the general population but 21 percent of enlisted personnel. Blacks are more likely to question the money spent overseas in Iraq rather than on better health care and education for people living here in the U.S.

5 Education and Crime. Education remains a high priority for Black voters, who are focused on closing gaps in student achievement, lowering the school dropout rate, and improving the academic performance of Black males. The high dropout rate, particularly among Black boys, is considered one of several contributing factors to disproportionately high crime and incarceration rates in the Black community. Incarceration is further linked to the loss of voting rights. While most states return the right to vote once a sentence has been completed, some states take voting rights away for life.

FOCUS ON HUMAN AND CIVIL RIGHTS

Facing spiraling unemployment, incarceration, dropout, and death rates, Black Americans are still locked in a profound struggle for equal citizenship. While individuals have achieved considerable success, as a group, the Black community remains at a pronounced economic, social, and educational disadvantage. Only 44 percent of Black Americans foresee an improved life for Black people in this country compared with 57 percent in a 1986 survey.

Although optimism about the future has fallen significantly over recent decades, Black voters and civil rights groups are mobilized, working to counter incidents of voter suppression and voting irregularities that have marked recent elections. Black voters say they are more committed than ever to ensuring that the heroes who sacrificed their lives for everyone's right to vote are vindicated.

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Focus On

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What Matters Most to Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered Persons

Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered (GLBT) persons are an important voting population whose issues are at the forefront of American civil rights and culture on both sides of the political spectrum. GLBT voters are highly motivated and personally invested in elections at both the state and federal levels.

Because the U.S. Census Bureau doesn't count the number of GLBT persons in the United States (only the number of same-sex, unmarried partner households), no precise figures for the GLBT population exist. However, one study showed that gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) voters comprised more than 10 percent (50,000+ persons) of voters within several contested congressional districts in the 2006 mid-term elections and that GLB voters generally comprised two to seven percent of all adults in closely contested congressional contests in 2006.

GLBT voters are monitoring candidates who support or oppose increasing their rights and protections in the areas of employment, education, military service, relationships (i.e., marriage, civil unions, domestic partnerships), partner benefits, and hate crimes. Because many of their rights are determined by the courts, some GLBTs may be highly invested in candidates' choices in nominating future judges. Like many other Americans, GLBTs also are concerned with the economy, health care, the environment, foreign policy, and the role of government.

GLBTs hail from all ethnic groups, so their GLBT-specific interests and concerns intersect with their other identities and community affiliations. While some GLBTs are more concerned with gaining specific rights and protections than others, the underlying principle that resonates with GLBTs across the political spectrum is the freedom to be who they are without repercussion or discrimination.

FAST FACTS

- An estimated **8.8 million** openly gay, lesbian, and bisexual adults live in the U.S. (2005)*
- In the 2000 and 2004 U.S. presidential elections, more than **75%** of gay and lesbian voters voted for the Democratic candidate.
- Anti-gay bias is one of the **top three** motivations for hate crimes in the U.S.
- As of April 2008, **20 states** and the **District of Columbia** have outlawed employment discrimination based on sexual orientation.

* A strong possibility of undercounting exists due to data gathering obstacles and other social factors.

HOT ISSUES FOR GLBTs

- 1 DISCRIMINATION
- 2 HATE CRIMES
- 3 GLBT RELATIONSHIPS
- 4 HEALTH CARE

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ISSUES AT A GLANCE

1 Discrimination. In the majority of states, it's still possible to be fired from your job because of your sexual orientation or gender identity. Securing anti-discrimination protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity in schools, workplaces, and public accommodations is high on the priority list for GLBT people. The Employment Non-Discrimination Act, a proposed law that would prohibit discrimination against GLBT employees, was recently introduced in Congress. States and municipal governments also may pass GLBT-related anti-discrimination measures.

2 Hate Crimes. Hate crimes against GLBT students such as Matthew Shepard (Wyoming) and, more recently, Lawrence King (California) have shocked the GLBT community. Many GLBTs don't feel safe where they live, travel, or go to school. In fact, 75 percent of youth hear derogatory remarks about their sexual orientation at school, and 38 percent of students perceived to be GLBT experience physical harassment. In 2007, Congress introduced, but did not pass, the Matthew Shepard Act (Hate Crimes Bill), which would have expanded federal penalties for committing acts of violence against homosexuals.

3 GLBT Relationships. Current legal status of same-sex relationships: Same-sex marriages are legal in California and Massachusetts. Out-of-state same-sex marriages are recognized in New York. Nine other states grant some or all state-level spousal rights to same-sex partners. Measures to repeal or ban same-sex marriage or other forms of same-sex unions will appear on the November 2008 ballot in at least three states (California, Arizona, and Florida). Rights and benefits that are based on, or influenced by, marital status include inheritance and beneficiary status, hospital visitation, taxation, and child custody.

4 Health Care. GLBT youth and adults are at risk of mental health ailments such as depression; suicidal behavior; bullying victimization; and physical ailments related to body image and eating disorders, smoking, substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, and other sexually transmitted diseases. Health risks are even more elevated for GLBT ethnic minorities. And yet many GLBT individuals, including elders, report facing discrimination in accessing health care and housing.

FOCUS ON HUMAN AND CIVIL RIGHTS

Many GLBTs point to the Stonewall Riots of 1969 in New York City as a watershed moment in the history of GLBT rights. The GLBT community became more visible in the 1980s with the advent of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. While the GLBT community has achieved significant gains in recent years, many GLBTs still lack basic civil protections. Consequently, the most visible issues affecting the GLBT community involve civil rights struggles—including job protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity; legal recognition of their relationships; reducing discrimination, bullying, and harassment in schools; the exclusion of gay service members in the military; and bans on unmarried couples adopting children or serving as foster parents.

Civil liberties principles that matter to GLBTs include freedom of expression, free association, and privacy. Relatively recent U.S. Supreme Court cases have established the right of GLBTs to privacy and equality.

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What Matters Most to Hispanics

The fastest growing ethnic group in the country, Hispanics are a diverse and dynamic people who are not of one culture or race. Many Hispanic families have lived in the United States for generations, while others are recent immigrants who hail from many countries of origin.

Today, Hispanics make up 15 percent of the United States population and nine percent of registered voters. Their share of the electorate lags because Hispanics are more likely than other Americans either to be under age 18, or noncitizens, or both.

Nevertheless, Hispanics are one of the most sought after voting groups, with a history of moving their support across party lines. Their political participation is growing and in California, in particular, their political influence has been strongly felt. What's more, their strategic placement—the high concentration of Hispanic voters in swing states such

as Florida, Colorado, New Mexico, and Nevada—is a growing political asset. In addition, data on the growth of the Hispanic population point to an important phenomenon: Hispanics are moving into new areas of the U.S., including the South, Midwest, and Northeast. In time, their political power will grow in these regions.

Those seeking to connect with Hispanic voters should be aware that language continues to be a major factor in their lives. About one in five Hispanics report they don't speak English or don't speak English well. In 2004, 70 percent of Hispanics reported that Spanish was the language they most often used at home. Moreover, in 2004, U.S. Census data indicated that one-quarter (26%) of Hispanics were “linguistically isolated,” that is, the dominant language in their home was not English and that no one in the home spoke English or spoke it well.

FAST FACTS

- **70%** of Hispanic registered voters say the country is going in the wrong direction—a higher percentage than the general population.
- Nearly **four in 10 (38%)** Hispanic voters say their situation in this country has gotten worse in the past year, compared with just **18%** who say it has improved.
- **65%** of Hispanics identified themselves as Democrats in 2008, compared to **55%** in 2004.
- **By 2050**, Hispanics will comprise **29%** of the U.S. population.

HOT ISSUES FOR HISPANICS

1 EDUCATION

2 COST OF LIVING AND JOBS

3 HEALTH CARE

4 CRIME

5 IMMIGRATION

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ISSUES AT A GLANCE

1 Education. Registered Hispanic voters overwhelmingly rank education as *the* most important issue, as they have for years. Hispanics want better schools for their children and teachers who will connect with their students and engage them in learning. Historically, schools in which a significant proportion of the student body was Hispanic have been seriously underfunded. Hispanics have lived the “savage inequalities” that Jonathan Kozol has documented in his books, and they strongly support full funding for public education. In addition, Hispanics are acutely concerned about the high dropout rate among Hispanic students and seek meaningful interventions to increase high school graduation rates.

2 Cost of Living and Jobs. The incomes of Hispanic households are 40 percent less than White non-Hispanic households, and Hispanics have poverty rates two to nearly three times the rates among Whites. So it’s not surprising the cost of living and jobs are two very important issues to this community, especially during a time of rising prices and unemployment. Hispanic voters support measures that boost income, such as increasing the minimum wage and strengthening workers’ rights to organize unions.

3 Health Care. More than one in five Hispanic children are uninsured—nearly three times the rate of non-Hispanic White children. The majority of Hispanic registered voters support universal health care coverage and initiatives such as the State Children’s Insurance Program.

4 Crime. There’s a big statistical dropoff between the top three concerns of Hispanics and the issue of crime. But crime remains on the list because many Hispanic families still cannot afford housing in safer neighborhoods.

5 Immigration. This issue was not in the top six for Hispanics in 2000 or 2004. But it is now, with 75 percent of Hispanic registered voters saying immigration is an important topic. This is due to the federal government’s more aggressive pursuit of undocumented immigrants since the collapse of the comprehensive immigration reform effort in Washington, D.C., and the increasing involvement of state and local police in the enforcement of federal immigration laws. Hispanics do not advocate open borders, but they do care how the borders are enforced. They believe immigration to the United States should be safe and legal.

FOCUS ON HUMAN AND CIVIL RIGHTS

Despite the diversity of the Hispanic population, there is remarkable consensus among them on the issues. The great majority of Hispanics translate the promise of the American Dream as quality education for every child, a living wage for their families, decent health care, and a safe neighborhood—all basic human rights as set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

When Hispanics see undocumented immigrants mistreated, especially families being broken up, and hear undocumented immigrants demonized, they are quick to remind America that these are hardworking people simply trying to make a better life for themselves and their children. For Hispanics in the United States today, human and civil rights are very much a matter of the here and now, rather than some bygone era.

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Tomorrow

What Matters Most to Women and Girls

2008 was an historic year for American women. Democratic Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton ran a groundbreaking campaign as the first viable woman candidate for president of the United States, and Alaska Governor Sarah Palin was selected as the vice presidential running mate for the Republican Party.

Women voters have been influencing electoral outcomes for more than eight decades, deciding on presidents and precedents in ways that have shaped public policy directly. By 1964, women comprised more than half of the U.S. electorate and, in 1980, the percentage of women who voted surpassed the percentage of men casting ballots.

Women tend to favor incumbents, especially for presidential elections, preferring to stick with a trusted, well-known person rather than trying someone new and unknown. The last three presidents who won reelection increased their support among women in their second bids.

Traditionally, women have been portrayed as gravitating toward the “SHE” issues: social security, health care, and education, while men have been associated with the “WE” issues: war and the economy. But the past three national elections (2002, 2004, and 2006) showed these narrow boxes didn’t apply. In 2004 and, again, in 2006, women told pollsters their choice of candidates were motivated by nontraditional “women’s issues.” The situation in Iraq and the “war on terror” were the top two, while morality/family values and jobs/economy vied for third place (11%).

It’s impossible to divide the life experiences and attitudes of American women into Republican and Democratic categories. Women take more than their political identity to the polls. For them, politics is not an isolated category but rather an all-encompassing arena into which they infuse their life experiences, needs, and expectations.

FAST FACTS

- **41%** of women voters say the economy/jobs is the issue most important to their vote in 2008.
- **52%** of women voters believe that electing more women in Washington will lead to less corruption.
- **20 million** unmarried women didn’t vote in the 2004 presidential election.
- **Minnesota** is the state with the highest rate of female voter participation (**67.9%**); **Arizona** has the lowest (**41.4%**).

HOT ISSUES FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS

① ECONOMIC

② CHILD CARE

③ HEALTH CARE

④ EDUCATION

⑤ EQUAL RIGHTS

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ISSUES AT A GLANCE

1 Economic. Women working full time today earn, on average, only 77 cents for every dollar paid to men. The numbers are even worse for women of color: A Black woman earns only 63 cents, and a Hispanic woman only 52 cents, for each dollar earned by a White male. Wage gaps persist across a wide spectrum of occupations, through every level of education and in every state of the country. But current federal laws are inadequate to close those gaps.

2 Child Care. For women voters, child care is a pressing issue. Research shows that child care helps children, families, and communities prosper. Child care helps families get ahead by giving parents the support and peace of mind they need to be productive at work and by helping children learn and develop the skills they need to succeed in school. But for many families, especially those with lower incomes, high quality child care is unaffordable or unavailable.

3 Health Care. More than 17 million women in the United States don't have any health care coverage. Although men and women face some similar challenges with regard to health insurance, the need for health care is even greater for women; women of all ages are nearly 40 percent more likely to take prescription medications on a regular basis. Because of these needs and women's lower incomes, more women

are "underinsured," meaning they have health insurance that requires them to spend more than 10 percent of their earnings on out-of-pocket expenses.

4 Education. An estimated one in four female students does not graduate with a regular high school diploma in the standard, four-year time period. The rates are even worse for female students of color. Nationwide, 37 percent of Hispanic, 40 percent of Black, and 50 percent of American Indian or Alaska Native female students failed to graduate in four years in 2004. While all high school dropouts pay significant costs for their lack of education, economic costs are particularly steep for women, who face limited employment prospects, low earnings potential, poor health status, and the need to rely on public support programs.

5 Equal Rights. Over the past 35 years, the federal courts have given life and meaning to legal rights for women through their interpretation of the Constitution's equal protection and privacy guarantees, including their application of federal statutes aimed at eradicating discrimination on the basis of gender. Most recently, many of these fundamental legal rights and principles have been placed at risk by judicial appointments made to the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeals.

FOCUS ON HUMAN AND CIVIL RIGHTS

Throughout the country, women still face significant problems that demand attention from policymakers, women's advocates, researchers, and unions. For example, one in four girls drops out of high school, resulting in an average annual income that falls \$9,100 below even the low wages earned by male high school dropouts. More than 14 million women—one in eight—live in poverty, and single women, women of color, and elderly women are especially vulnerable.

Political participation has been an important way for women of every race and ethnicity to shape the policies that affect their lives. By voting, running for office, and taking advantage of other avenues for participation, women give voice to their particular concerns, experiences, and priorities. In the words of author Martha Burk, "women have the number and voting power to control any election" and the numbers to "affect the national agenda after the elections are over."

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